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ABSTRACT

In August 1981, a task force was created at Maryland's Prince George's Community College (PGCC) to analyze the college's General Education (GE) requirements in terms of their appropriateness as a major component of Associate Degree (AD) programs. Rather than increase the number of GE requirements, the task force sought to identify the skills, knowledge, and values addressed by each. Academic divisions were then asked to rework their syllabi so that courses addressed one or more of the skills, knowledge, and values. In 1987, the task force was resurrected to further review GE requirements, recommending that both mathematics and science be required and that business mathematics not be allowed to replace the mathematics requirement since the course was not accepted at the University of Maryland. Another recommendation for a computer literacy requirement was not approved. Recently, the task force was asked to strengthen GE requirements to comply with state standards for ADs, recommending that AD recipients complete 34 credit hours distributed among 7 subjects and adding computer literacy and cultural diversity requirements. The new GE requirements have help PGCC's students in two significant ways. The additional courses mean that students are better prepared to succeed in life and state requirements mean that students can have up to 36 GE credits accepted at other institutions of higher learning. (HAA)

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THE EVOLUTION OF GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS AT PRINCE GEORGE'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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BIOGRAPHY - ROBERT BARSHAY & CATHERINE CANT

In 1965 & '67 **Robert Barshay** earned a B.A. & M.A. in English at The Pennsylvania State Univ. From 1996 to '68, Robert was an instructor of English at northern Michigan Univ., where he taught a required humanities course & composition.

Robert & his wife then decided to live abroad. Robert "put on hold" an acceptance to the University of Maryland's doctorate program in American Studies, & traveled to Israel. From 1968 to '69, they lived in an ulpan, a community of non-Israelis who participate in language immersion, to learn Hebrew, & also on a kibbutz. From 1969 to '70, Robert taught literature & composition at the University of Haifa, English as a foreign language at a kibbutz, & literature in Tel Aviv to students in a program affiliated with Oxford University in England.

They returned to the States in 1970, at which time Robert began working on a Ph.D. in American Studies at Maryland. Robert's dissertation on Philip Wylie was completed in 1975; Maryland awarded him the Ph.D. that year. In 1972, while he was a student, the Prince George's Community college hired him as an associate professor of English, & he remained there to this day.

Besides his formal, academic education, teaching & administrative experience, he has been involved in or contributed to other activities. For three weeks in the summer of 1986, I attended The Humanities Institute in Cambridge, England, & completed in good standing "Edwardians & Moderns: English Fiction From 1890 - 1930," for which he earned three semester hours of graduate credit from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. From 1987 to '92, he attended The University of Baltimore School of Law at night, where he was awarded a Juris Doctor degree. He was admitted to the Maryland State Bar in 1993, & to the District of Columbia Bar in 1994. As a result of new interests, he is a practitioner member of the Academy of Family Mediators & was appointed to serve on the Montgomery County Commission on the Humanities.

Catherine Cant is Chair of the Department of Mathematics/Engineering at Prince George's Community College. She has been teaching mathematics for thirty years, twenty-three of them at Prince George's. She currently serves on the General Education Task Force & the Cross-Cultural Education Advisory Council at Prince George's, & on the K-16 Mathematics Partnership, which is a statewide effort to establish standards for mathematics education from kindergarten through university core requirements. She has been instrumental in the development of three new mathematics courses & revisions to several traditional mathematics courses, in response to changing needs & new technology. Mrs. Cant received her A.B. in mathematics from Randolph-Macon Woman's College, & her M.S. in mathematics from the University of Connecticut. Additional graduate work includes computer science, education & English.

The Evolution of General Education Requirements at
Prince George's Community College

On August 5, 1981, the president of Prince George's Community College (PGCC) created a Task Force to investigate the college's general education requirements. The president's action was instigated by one of the institutional objectives for fiscal year 1982 to "evaluate the College's General Education requirements in terms of their purpose and appropriateness as a major component of the Associate Degree programs." That was the beginning of a long term review and ongoing assessment of Prince George's Community College's general education requirements that has seen continuous modifications, and that culminated in a major reform in 1995.

The Task Force then and now has consisted of faculty from representative instructional areas, and influential administrators. Since then, general education has grown in prestige and visibility on campus as the cluster of courses from which, we recognized from the outset, students learn a common body of skills, values, and knowledge that are requisite to becoming a literate human being. We felt then, as we do today, that all Associate degree-seeking students should be steeped in this common learning experience as a result of which they would think and communicate intelligently and critically and thus be equipped for rational decision making and problem solving in an increasingly complex society.

In 1981 when the Task Force was first charged by the president to investigate the college's basic education requirements, we found that these requirements were limited to:

English	6 credit hours
Humanities	3 credit hours
Mathematics/science	3-4 credit hours
Social Science	3 credit hours
Physical Education	2 credit hours
	17-18 credit hours

Our recommendations to the president in 1983 did not include enlarging the number of course requirements in general education, which in hindsight is surprising considering that the college required only one humanities course, one social science course, and one course in either math or science. Rather, the Task Force proposed for itself a task, requiring much time and paper work, but eminently doable, to analyze general education and articulate its components into the categories of skill, knowledge, and values.

Then we asked the academic divisions to review all the course master syllabi of those courses that fulfilled general education requirements, and rework the courses so that their outcomes addressed one or more of the many skills, knowledge, and values that we had articulated. The point of this two year

exercise was to encourage the faculty to carefully redesign the general education courses and their stated outcomes so that these outcomes would connect to "authentic" general education components as the Task Force understood them.

We deliberately avoided recommending core multidisciplinary courses in addition to the customary distribution requirements already in existence for several reasons: the creation of such courses would require a massive undertaking involving cooperation among diverse groups on campus with a history of doing things another way; core courses are often better in the description than in reality, tending to be, on occasion, too general and unfocused, too removed from substantive academic tradition; core courses are often difficult to staff; and they tend to be idiosyncratic, for which appropriate materials and textbooks are often hard to come by. Our thinking may have been partly or mainly correct; it also may have been a clever rationalization to avoid politically difficult tasks that might not, after much grief and work, have been accepted.

The vice president for instruction resurrected the Task Force several years later in 1987 to review the college's general education requirements, and make recommendations about what we might do to strengthen them. Our biggest accomplishment then was to propose that the college require both math and science, instead of allowing one or the other. This was approved. Next, we proposed that business math not be permitted to fulfill the math requirement. That caused more controversy than one would have expected, as business math covered such concepts as balancing the check book, but stopped short of introducing algebra beyond simple equations.

In fact, although our college allowed business math to fulfill the general education math requirement, it was not accepted at the University of Maryland, the place where most of our transfer students attended after leaving us. That notwithstanding, howls of protest were heard from the areas of office technology and secretarial education, whose programs required business math. Fortunately, the college accepted this recommendation as well. During this review, the Task Force also proposed that the college create and require a computer literacy course. Approval was not forthcoming for this recommendation, partly, we believe, because the need for computer literacy was not as compelling then as now.

To provide a mathematics course that would take the place of business math and fulfill the general education math requirement, the Mathematics Department surveyed the programs that had required business math to ascertain what topics were needed. Then the two semesters of business math were replaced with two separate courses. One course, called business and consumer math, continued to provide the topics that were not algebra-based; it did not meet the general education requirements. The second course, called mathematics for general education, provided

algebra-based topics found in other college-level courses, and was designed to meet the general education requirements and transfer to the University of Maryland.

Recently, the Task Force on General Education was charged by the vice president of instruction to strengthen the college's general education requirements to comply with the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) fortified plan for general education for the Associate of Arts, the Associate of Science, and Associate of Applied Science degrees. With MHEC's interest in bettering articulation among the educational institutions within the state, particularly between community colleges and four year colleges, we used this opportunity as well to improve the transferability of our students' general education courses to the University of Maryland's programs.

MHEC has determined that the A.A. and A.S. degrees require a minimum of 30 credits of general education courses, and that the newly created Applied Science degree (A.A.S.) requires 20 credits of general education courses. To accomplish that for the A.A. and A.S. degrees, the Task Force recommended, in compliance with MHEC, that the college increase the number of required credits in Humanities and in Social Science from three to six, in science from three or four to six to seven (one course having a lab component). In addition, MHEC provided each institution the latitude to create two new categories in general education, if it so chose, from each of which students could be required to take three credits. The Task Force decided to take advantage of this opportunity and created two new categories: Computer Literacy and Cultural Diversity. The timing seemed right for both. Except for a few programs in which requirements were already high (close to the 70 credit ceiling earlier established by MHEC) because of external governmental and accrediting demands, such as nursing, we decided that a general education course can fulfill credits in only one general education category.

We recommend that the A.A. and A.S. degree recipients, then, must take a minimum of 34 credit hours distributed among the following subjects:

Categories	Credit Hours Required
A. English	6
B. Humanities	6
C. Social Sciences	6
D. Mathematics	3-4
E. Science	7
F. Computer Literacy	3
G. Cultural Diversity	3
Total	34-35

The decision to recommend an increase in the Humanities requirement from three to six assumes that three of those credits would be fulfilled with a basic speech course. In effect, we

proposed creating two subcategories within the Humanities rubric, and designate those courses that fulfill the speech requirement and those that fulfill any other humanities requirement, such as philosophy, art, or music.

The Task Force was delighted to resurrect Computer Literacy as a component of General Education. By this time, it was obvious to almost everyone that a literate human being with the skills to survive in our increasingly complex world should know the value of the computer in its varied uses, such as word processing, and be able to perform many of them. A basic course, already on the books, was designed for the novice student, but those with higher level needs could take an appropriate course required in one of several programs in lieu of the basic course in which more sophisticated knowledge and use of the computer was a prerequisite. In that situation, a student might only need to take 31 credits in general education.

Unlike Computer Literacy, the issue as to which courses would fulfill the category of Cultural Diversity was less obvious and politically more sensitive. Because virtually all departments on campus sent the Task Force most of the courses they house as appropriate offerings for this category, we defined Cultural Diversity as a comparison and/or contrast between two or more cultures, between two or more subcultures within a culture, or between two or more subcultures from two or more different cultures. That comparison or contrast of two or more cultures or subcultures had to be central to the course's syllabus, which the Task Force used to determine course suitability. The study of only one culture or subculture did not constitute cultural diversity for us. Finally, we observed that the purpose of Cultural Diversity courses is to provide our students with a better understanding of and appreciation for other cultures or subcultures through the modes of comparison and/or contrast. The students' own culture may be included in the course, though such inclusion is by no means necessary.

The Task Force met again in response to the new state requirements developed by MHEC. The Commission stated that the minimum acceptable mathematics course should be college algebra. Since the traditional college algebra course is taken primarily by science, mathematics, and engineering students, this requirement would have prevented nearly every other major from earning a degree without their first taking several additional preparatory courses.

There was a prompt state-wide response: every two- and four-year public institution in Maryland was represented at a meeting at which a compromise was proposed. The requirement would be a mathematics course "at or above the level of" college algebra. MHEC accepted that compromise, along with a careful definition of that "level." Then each institution had to adjust courses and/or add new courses to meet the requirement.

The new general education requirements at PGCC have helped our students in two significant ways. First, and most important, our students, to graduate with an Associates degree, now must take two humanities courses instead of one, two social science courses instead of one (from two different disciplines), two science courses instead of one, and one math course at or above the level of college algebra instead of a business math course. (Many years ago, one course in business math would have sufficed for both math and science.) They are truly better prepared to succeed in life, not only in terms of finding a gratifying career, but also in terms of appreciating and understanding the world about them, and living well within it.

Second, because of the efforts of the Maryland Higher Education Commission, up to thirty-six credits in general education from one institution of higher learning within the state must be accepted by another institution in the state. For community colleges like us, this is a real boon to our students. In the past, four year colleges and universities would pick and choose which courses they would accept from our students. The result was sometimes arbitrary and whimsical, and usually unpredictable, depending upon the individual, and his or her prejudices, making that determination from the receiving institution. Now our students, by state fiat, have their credits in general education accepted by the college they transfer to when they choose to earn a higher degree. Their success reflects well upon them and us.

Robert Barshay, Ph.D., Dean of English and Humanities
Catherine Cant, M.S., Professor of Mathematics

Prince George's Community College